

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION AND BICYCLE COMMITTEE (PTBC)

Fiscal Year 2007

First, the PTBC wishes to express its gratitude to the many Town personnel, staff, and officials who gave of their time to meet with the Committee and share their advice, opinions, and knowledge covering a wide array of subjects in our committee charge. We also thank Town Meeting for its debate and approval of an allocation from the Transportation Enterprise Fund (TEF) to finance transit services that are available year-round to residents. The Finance Committee's recommendation to approve the Town-funded routes, the Select Board's vote to amend the wording of the TEF mission statement to include funding for public transportation, as well as the Town Manager's facilitation of these two processes were key to Town Meeting's vote in support of the Town-funded routes.

The PTBC has been especially active this past year. The Select Board approved our recommendation to change the wording of the TEF mission statement to reflect the original intent of the fund: "To provide a parking and public transportation system that meets the needs of Amherst residents and businesses, and that can be supported through fees and other alternative non-tax sources." We formed a subcommittee that focused on the specific issue of community public transportation. The "Outreach Route" subcommittee worked for many months to develop, budget, and improve transit service connecting various neighborhoods in North Amherst, South Amherst, and Echo Hill with popular commercial destinations such as Downtown, Atkins Corner, and Cushman Market, as well as the surrounding towns. Adding a Gatehouse Road extension to the Belchertown Express Bus increased the Gatehouse Road service to seven runs per day while substantially cutting the Town's cost. The North and South outreach routes were combined to form Route 32 Puffer's Pond-Atkins Corner. With this route, riders may travel from North to South Amherst without changing buses. Route 32 also serves as a central spine for the development of transit services in the future. For the first time this year, summer Saturday service was offered on Route 32, and it was well utilized by residents. In sum, the total changes to the Outreach Routes resulted in a reduction of the total number of route miles funded by the Town (from 23.7 to 20.7). These route changes resulted from a cooperative effort with UMass Transit and PVRTA. Ultimately, we slogged through the myriad details of planning and operating the Town-funded routes. We thank UMass and the PVRTA for their patience and expertise during this phase of restructuring the Town-funded routes.

For the first time this year, Town funding for transit services included a small allocation for promoting Town-funded routes. The subcommittee engaged in several promotional activities aimed at increasing ridership on Town-funded routes. Several hundred bookmarks with the bus schedule printed on one side were placed at local businesses, the Jones Library, the Town Hall, and on buses. Service schedules and notices were placed in newsletters of the Echo Hill Neighborhood Association and the Chamber of

Commerce. In addition, Committee members posted directions for taking the 32 Bus to Puffer's Pond from high density neighborhoods in North Amherst and encouraged a reporter to cover this route for the *Amherst Bulletin*.

The PTBC has worked to increase its responsiveness to the needs of Amherst residents and visitors, especially concerning issues of bus service, motor vehicle congestion, parking problems, bicycle accommodations, and the quality of the pedestrian atmosphere downtown. Several meetings were spent reviewing the following plans: traffic calming measures on Lincoln Avenue, the proposed dual roundabout at Atkins Corner, widening Route 116 over the Notch, new sidewalks and crosswalks downtown, and the Veridian Village development at Hampshire College. Our review of the Veridian Village plans indicated several adjustments that would improve pedestrian and public transit access to that development, including installing a pedestrian signal at the entrance in lieu of a rotary, adding bus pull-offs on Route 116, and adding sidewalks and crosswalks. These recommendations were made in writing to Larry Archey at Hampshire College. The Committee also considered several proposals that were not approved, including adding bike lanes to Pelham Road, extending parking meter hours, and altering the route of the Amity Shuttle to include a stop at the Whole Foods market in Hadley.

The PTBC welcomes the challenge of guarding the safety, desires, and convenience of Amherst residents. Members of the community are invited to attend Committee meetings to communicate their concerns and ideas. Despite the current fiscal situation, the Committee believes in its goal of developing a unified system that meets the needs of pedestrians, transit riders, cyclists, and drivers in the Town of Amherst. Again, on behalf of the Committee, we thank you for this fantastic opportunity to help Amherst grow and lead the region into the future of "people propulsion."

Respectfully submitted,
Franklin E. Wells, Chair